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WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Mexico: The Presidential Succession Begins

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MEXICO: THE PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION BEGINS

In Mexico's unique political system, the announcement last month that Luis Echeverria was the presidential candidate of the ruling Revolutionary Party (PRI) was tantamount to his being named Mexico's leader for six years, beginning on 1 December 1970. From now until the election in July, nevertheless, Echeverria will campaign just as vigorously as if he were running in a highly competitive situation. The long and arduous campaign is the vehicle by which the Mexicans are introduced to and made familiar with their president-designate. Conversely, it affords him the opportunity to become acquainted with the country's people, problems, and capabilities.

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There is more than ordinary interest in this campaign because of the many indications that Mexico will experience difficult political problems during Echeverria's term of office. The country's extraordinary economic progress and political stability over the years have encouraged the public to expect more than the government is able to deliver. The educational level of a significant proportion of the people and their rising political sophistication, moreover, have led them to question the country's traditional values and even to protest against the style, if not the form, of government; there is a growing unwillingness to accept the mere facade of political democracy.

Open resistance to Mexico City's dictates has occurred with increasing frequency in the outlying regions. A small opposition party--the National Action Party--which drew no serious attention on any level a few years ago, now is giving the government party real competition in a few large cities, and early this week challenged it for the first time on the state level. The intensity of protests over the past few years seems in part to have been a response to the personality and style of President Diaz Ordaz, and the traditional high respect for the person of the president has declined markedly under his administration. Luis Echeverria has never held elective office, and his public image has not been developed as yet. The political decisions he makes after he takes office will either consolidate the PRI's monopoly on power or accelerate movement toward a new political framework.

THE PRI: ALL SYSTEMS GO!

The presidential campaign is the occasion of the PRI's finest hour, the opportunity to stage operations on a national scale. The PRI is a party neither in the US sense, nor in the traditional Latin American sense of a personalistic group. It is, rather, the political projection of the 60-year-old revolution and the means by which all Mexicans can affiliate with national aims and identify with the government. The PRI's tricolor banner is identical with the Mexican flag; its platform is carrying out the revolution and achieving the social and economic goals of the constitution.

In practical terms the PRI is a vehicle of the "ruling family" of [illegible]. It also furnishes crowds for parades [illegible] other expressions of Mexican unity. [illegible] government's channel to the people and [illegible] to the grass-roots mood.

The PRI's three "sectors"--labor, peasant, and "popular," (a euphemism covering

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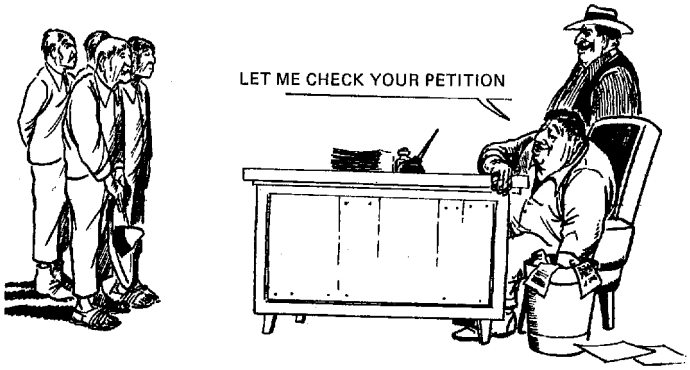
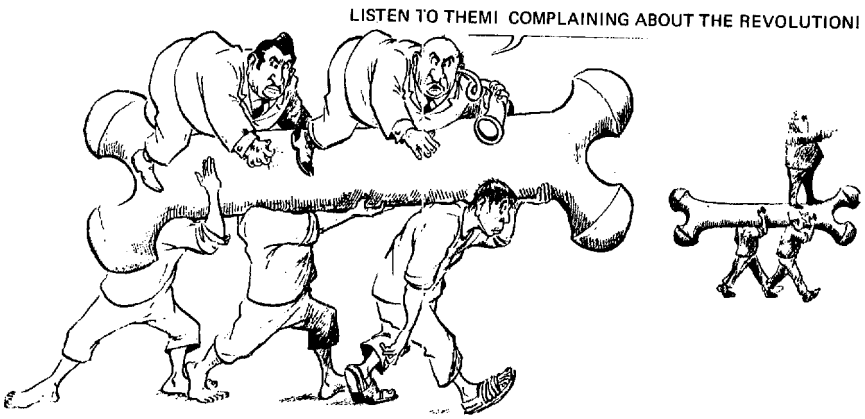
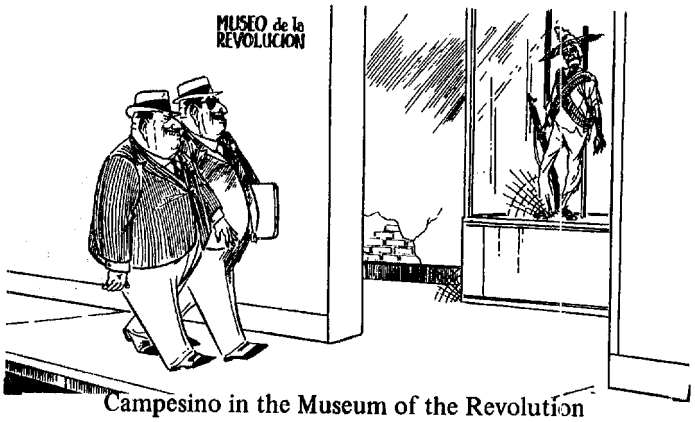
THE CAMPESINO: FORGOTTEN MAN OF THE REVOLUTION







Campesino in the Museum of the Revolution

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professionals, intellectuals, businessmen, and anyone else who does not fall into the other categories)—are represented in all states and at the local level. For some years, most of the power has been concentrated in the smallest sector—the popular. This inequity reflects the general condition of the revolution, which has brought affluence to professional, business, construction, and manufacturing segments and has provided a moderately improved standard of living for those covered by unions and social security. The large mass of landless peasants, agricultural workers, and the rural cooperatives (ejidos) have benefited little, however.

OIL FOR SQUEAKING WHEELS

This discrepancy, and ideological differences as well, place severe strains on the unity of the PRI. Some delivery on promises will have to be made if discontent in the have-not sectors is to be kept within bounds. Six years ago, Diaz Ordaz, as the presidential candidate, devoted much of his campaign to statements recognizing the serious plight of rural Mexicans, whom he promised to help. His five-year incumbency, however, has produced no real program for the amelioration of rural poverty. Diaz Ordaz has mainly used the time-honored tactic of giving away land, and in fact has distributed more acreage than any other president. Diaz Ordaz has said publicly, however, that distributable land is running out and that new solutions must be found.

Echeverria has also identified rural poverty as the number-one problem in Mexico, and the peasant sector was given the honor of first announcing him as "its choice" for the country's next president. Unrest among the peasants has been serious for many years. The armed forces have clashed frequently with squatters or with peasants outraged by the corruption or brutality of local political bosses. The incidence of violence in the countryside has grown in several regions, and, without some relief, peasant discontent could become difficult to contain.

Diaz Ordaz has also attempted to ease pressure from the labor sector, which had been largely ignored during the early part of his term. This year he sent to Congress new labor legislation that would totally revise the 38-year-old law now in effect. Some of the radical, pro-labor articles in the draft, however, will be watered down by Congress, which acts almost totally at the bidding of the executive branch. The 40-hour week, which is a major demand of organized labor, apparently will be rejected by the legislature. Explicit provisions calling for low-cost housing for workers will probably also be diluted to make them more acceptable to concerned employers. Nevertheless, these gestures will have the important political effect of conciliating the labor sector and ensuring full cooperation during the succession period.

A TARNISHED IMAGE

In addition to sectoral rivalry, grumbling from the ranks, and other threats of disunity, the PRI and its candidates have a public relations problem. Even though the PRI/government complex claims to welcome "competition" from opposition parties as an expression of the democratic process, it has been loath to let the people express a nay. Rejection of the PRI by the voters in several outlying states has been overturned and clumsy electoral hanky-panky has projected the PRI organization as something between a bully and a laughing stock.

Manipulation of the balloting appears to have occurred last weekend in the gubernatorial election in the peninsular state of Yucatan, where the ruling party was challenged seriously for the first time on the state level. Final official results

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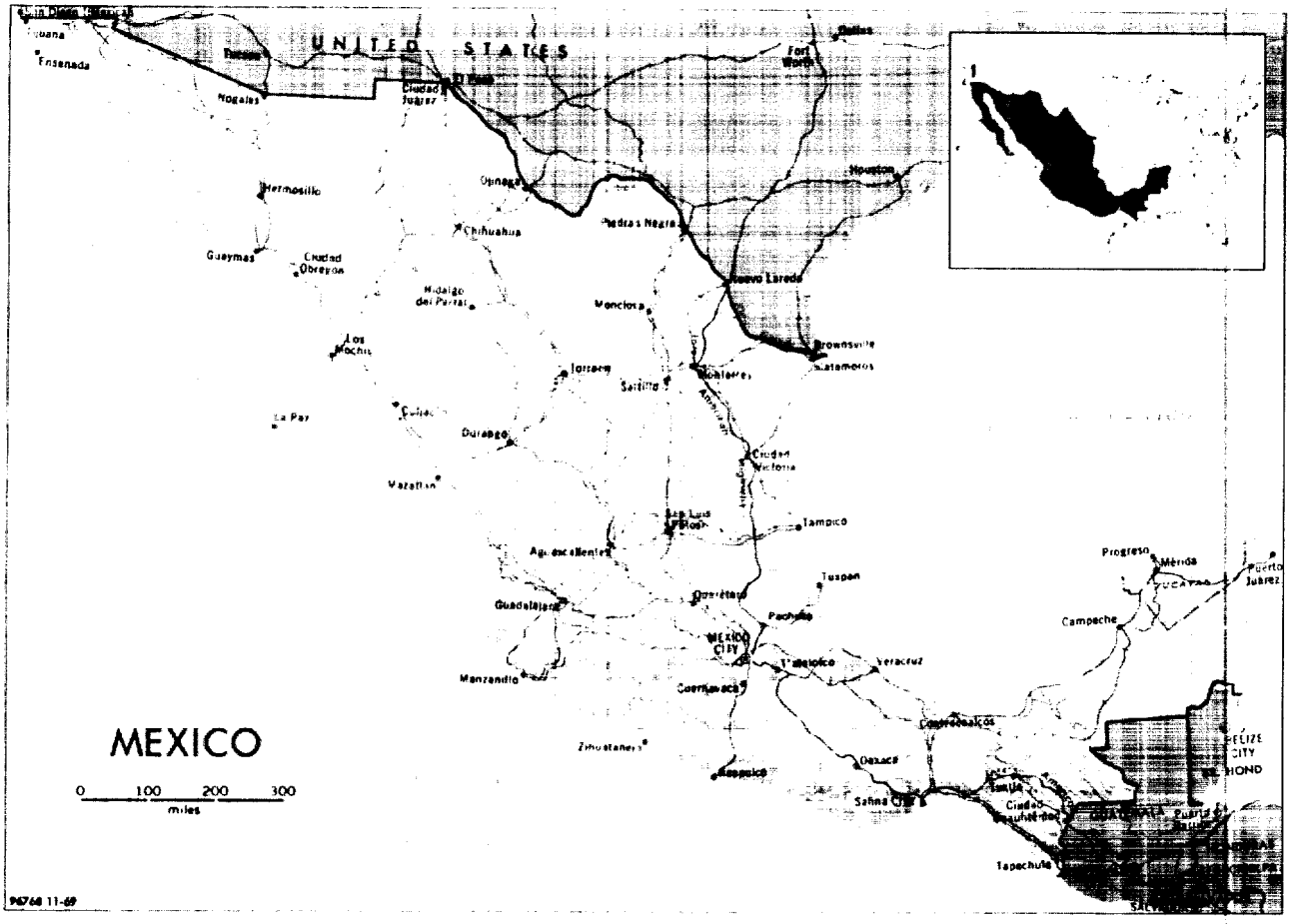

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are not yet available, but the capital city of Merida is under military control following post-electoral violence. The issue of the Yucatan elections will probably haunt the PRI throughout the presidential campaign.

The PRI has a credibility problem closely related to the opinion of some Mexicans, especially the young and well-educated, that the elaborate party structure is outmoded and the imposition of political power from above is no longer acceptable. The desire for rapid movement toward democratic processes and decentralization is strong in this minority element. Mexico City's political dictates and its imposition of state and local candidates are heartily resented in highly developed states or those that harbor strong suspicions that political interests in the capital have little in common with their own. Mexico's increasingly sophisticated and articulate public is outgrowing the political system that was so effective in governing a backward society. The politically aware view with cynicism the revolutionary cliches that are often used to mask domestic failures.

The young dissidents attached to or on the fringes of the PRI may have been held there by their spokesman for change, the late Carlos Madrazo. He was the president of the PRI for a short time until his innovative, democratizing moves created great consternation and disruption within the party, which led to his dismissal. After his ouster, Madrazo personified the dissidents' hopes for either a new party or some change in the existing PRI. He died this summer in a plane crash, and with no other charismatic figure on the scene, his followers will probably drift away from the PRI and refrain from political activity or try to work from one of the small opposition parties.

Until and unless some new advocate of reform emerges, the party will lose some young, potential leaders, but the hierarchy will probably find this loss more acceptable than disruption by dissidence. The PRI will shun political experimentation in favor of maintaining the status quo.

LUIS ECHEVERRIA

As secretary of government in charge of security for the past five years, Echeverria is more aware than anyone else of the turmoil that attended Madrazo's experiments and is therefore not likely to be innovative. His role as the key member of the cabinet has been to stabilize the political processes during a very difficult time. The inability of the students to resume their antigovernment activities over the past year is a solid achievement for Echeverria, who has shown that he knows the power of the government and is not hesitant to use it.

For 11 years Echeverria worked directly under Diaz Ordaz, who obviously believes that the political problems of Mexico require a firm hand and the dedication of a staunch believer in the PRI and in the suitability of the system to Mexico's needs. Echeverria has these qualities. He is highly intelligent, hard working, and has an outstanding capacity to absorb facts and ideas. He is thoroughly familiar with the twists and turns of the bureaucracy because his entire adult life has been spent in politics and he has risen through the ranks of party and government. Like Diaz Ordaz, Echeverria is a strong nationalist and a strong believer in the rule of law and institutions.

ECHEVERRIA AS POLICY MAKER

There are some probabilities, but no certainties, about Echeverria's particular view from the top. His long tenure in the Government Secretariat undoubtedly has provided him a firm basis for judgment of domestic needs and priorities. US observers in Mexico speculate that he favors

LUIS ECHEVERRIA

economic policy of a somewhat more leftist turn than that of Diaz Ordaz. He may devote even more attention to social welfare than has Diaz Ordaz, and he is likely to give greater emphasis to Mexicanization (the policy of having business and industry at least 51 percent in the hands of nationals) to satisfy criticism of the heavy foreign presence in industry. Echeverria considers that many foreign businessmen do not contribute to Mexico's development in proportion to their profits. Nationalization of specific industries thus is a possibility. Echeverria has argued that the government could run the telephone system better than the present private (mainly Mexican) ownership does.

Echeverria's three years in the Education Secretariat during the 1950s and his deep involvement with the student crisis more recently have alerted him to the deficiencies of Mexican education, and he may therefore attempt reforms in that area.

PRI spokesmen, setting the scene for the unveiling of the next president, have talked about needed reforms in the terms of ideas generated by the party's Institute of Political, Economic, and Social Studies. These have included fiscal reform, attending to agrarian problems, expanding public housing, broadening social security, increasing the state's economic role, pressing Mexicanization, furthering the availability and allocation of credit, improving labor relations, easing problems of bureaucracy, supervision of the communications media, and an improved balance of trade through pushing exports. This is predictable rhetoric, however, and there is increasing pressure to move beyond the identification of problems to be solved and toward effective action.

If Echeverria has strong preferences or particular interests in the field of foreign policy, he has not expressed them publicly. Diaz Ordaz has concentrated on cementing friendly relations with Mexico's close neighbors and has done little more

than was required of him on the international scene except for his pursuit of Mexico's favorite themes of disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation. Mexico received high praise for hosting the XIX Olympiad in 1968. Both the Olympics and attention to nuclear problems, however, were carry overs from the flamboyant internationalism of Diaz Ordaz' predecessor, Lopez Mateos. Although Echeverria could surprise, it is unlikely that he will favor a heartier Mexican voice in international affairs or pursue a new course in foreign policy.

Echeverria's history of cooperation and cordiality toward the United States on bilateral and multilateral issues suggests that he will continue Mexico's policy of friendship toward Washington. A number of bilateral problems continue to cause friction. These include the US commitment to reduce the salinity of the Colorado River, which the Mexicans feel has not been fully carried out; US market quotas on Mexican agricultural produce; Mexican agricultural workers (braceros) in the US; and a host of commercial matters. It is possible that Washington's recent assault on the problem of drugs and marijuana (Operation Intercept) may have given Echeverria and the Foreign Ministry some pause about relations with the US. Mexicans, even at the highest level, were deeply offended by this operation, which to them represented a basic change in US policy toward Mexico. Nevertheless, Echeverria's contacts with the US Embassy have remained completely cordial since his elevation as the presidential heir apparent.

DIAZ ORDAZ PLANS A PEACEFUL LEGACY

The need for order and the appearance of unity is particularly keen during the succession period, and the government has every intention of providing the appropriate setting for a smooth transition. The tranquility of the Mexican political scene has been interrupted frequently and vehemently during the incumbent administration, and security measures were strengthened considerably during and following the large-scale, violent student demonstrations last year. The serenity that has prevailed during 1969 has not been natural or effortless. The government continues to use no-nonsense and often arbitrary methods of dealing with troublemakers, and it makes frequent use of preventive detention to block potential disturbances.

The image of a strong executive in firm control of the country at peace with itself was carefully projected by Diaz Ordaz this September in his last state-of-the-union message before the unveiling of his successor. Alluding to the student disturbances, he took full responsibility for the government's tough response to disorder and stressed that the Mexican people as a whole openly favor law and order. He made a point of thanking the workers and campesinos for remaining "deaf to seditious blandishments" and rejected the idea that the demonstrations reflected deeper problems within Mexican society. Diaz Ordaz and the administration were clearly stung by the student protest, which appeared to deny that Mexico is an open society. The last section of his address was replete with references to freedom for, and tolerance of, dissent. Noting that political and other questions have never before been so widely and freely debated, Diaz Ordaz said that "the attitude of the person who tries to break down open doors is absurd."

PROBLEMS OF THE CAMPAIGN

The rhetoric from the ruling party/government leadership and the exhibition of political unity and good will are practiced and habitual, and show no promise of reform or change that might effectively woo back those who want to

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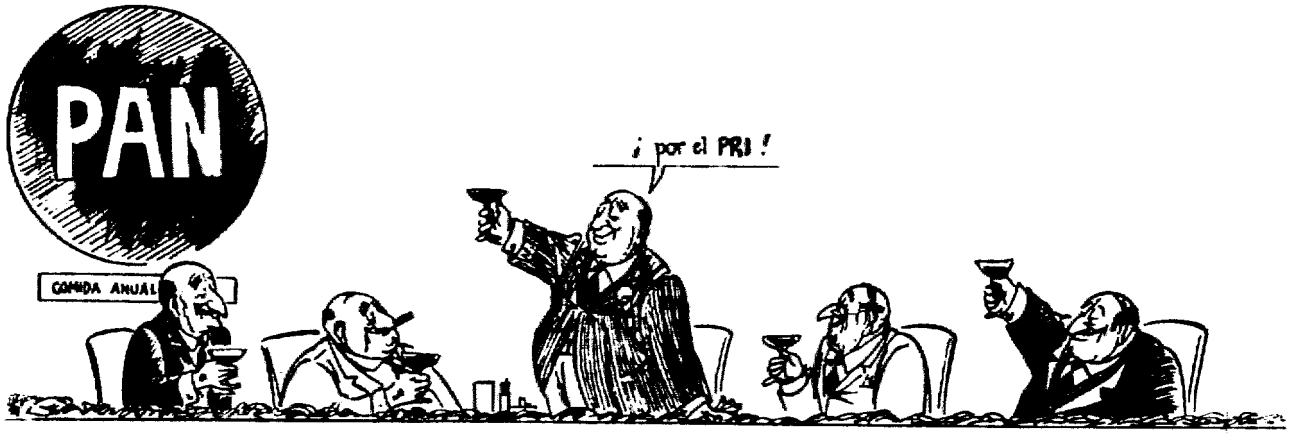
The opposition toasts the ruling party. (The PAN's growth is due to the PRI's fumbles.)



move toward representative politics. The choice of Echeverria undoubtedly shattered any hopes of a new direction in domestic policy. Even though he has been the front runner for the presidential selection for some time, many found hope in what had been Mexico's tradition of installing a distinctly different personality in Los Pinos—the presidential residence—every six years. Although all presidents over the past 30 years fit into the center of Mexico's political spectrum, they alternately leaned left and right [redacted] Echeverria, like Diaz Ordaz before him, is identified as Mexico's top policeman. Even beyond their both having been minister of government with its security responsibilities, both men appear remarkably similar in philosophy and life style. The effect of Echeverria's selection on elements alienated by Diaz Ordaz, therefore, is likely to be devastating. He may make conciliatory gestures toward these groups, but he sees them as a minority deserving only the kind of attention that minimizes their potential for interference or disruption.

Students head the list of vocal dissidents. For the most part, the government has ignored their demands, but even in the face of student disturbances, it did not veer from its commitment to give the vote to 18-year-olds. This constitutional amendment probably will pass in the state legislatures in time for next July's election, and will give an estimated 2.7 million young people a political voice. Student alienation, which is substantial, [redacted] is likely to continue and even grow. Furthermore, the government's use of force and the bloodshed at Tlatelolco in October 1968 left a bad taste among those who are likely to cause the most trouble for Mexican politics in the next few years—the educated middle class. This group in particular is likely to believe that the choice of Echeverria, who was involved in the student crisis, is Diaz Ordaz' way of ensuring against a public rehashing of Tlatelolco as well as of protecting his place in Mexican history.

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THE EMERGING OPPOSITION

The beneficiary of the growing disenchantment with the government/PRI complex has been the small, moderate National Action Party (PAN).

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The PAN has been on the Mexican political scene for 30 years, but it only recently emerged in some areas as challenger to the PRI monopoly of political power. This was a direct result of the PRI's bad performance and failure to recognize the popular will. The PAN is primarily a middle-class party whose greatest strength is in urban areas outside Mexico City. Its support comes from those who are economically independent of the government or PRI organizations and from those whose education and political consciousness lead them to question the propriety of one-party government at this stage of national development.

Over the last three years the PAN has won elections in a few important cities. A good part of its growing support, however, apparently derives from its abused, underdog status in several recent elections,

The PAN presidential candidate in the 1964 elections took a mere 11 percent of the vote. Armed with the increasingly important issue of political liberalization and a "respectability" it has not had in the past, the PAN as of now plans again to field a national candidate in 1970. He is Efrain Gonzalez Luna Morfin, the son of a former PAN presidential candidate who also helped found the party. Gonzalez Morfin won the nomination in a vigorous floor battle with another candidate in an open intraparty contest that contrasts greatly with the methods of the ruling group.

Even though the PAN has no chance of victory and is unlikely to make a significant showing in the national race, its persistence in acting the role of the opposition may eventually force the ruling group to give substance to the principle of popular participation in government. The PAN, which is hoping for the eventual development of a two-party form of government in which it will have a national role, most likely will continue as the responsible opposition if the government party ends its policy of "winning" elections regardless of the vote.

The Mexican security apparatus is effective, and its services may be needed during the long campaign. Echeverria plans close contact with the people throughout the country and has taken on the arduous task of long bus trips to the states. This could pay off in popularity. First he will go to the remote northwest states, including some where he, Diaz Ordaz, and "Mexico City politics" are unpopular because of past election interference. Echeverria is a vigorous 47-year-old with a personable style and native resourcefulness. The well-practiced political organization will plaster his image and paint his name in every corner of the republic, and his fame will go before him. He will need all of this to overcome the anticipated protests that frequently are a source of trouble. Despite the preparation for a peaceful campaign, there is a considerable chance of violence. 25X6 25X6

For Luis Echeverria to achieve real popularity and to re-establish the honored position of the presidency, will be a great task. Echeverria's intellectual excellence and general high ratings in dedication and capability may give him the wherewithal to overcome his handicaps, however. If Echeverria the candidate can become Echeverria the popular president, the aging Revolution might yet be rejuvenated. 25X6 25X6 25X1 25X1